

This is the fifth in a series of short homilies on the lessons of climate change.

As far back as [Sierra Club v. Morton](#), Justice Blackmun quoted John Donne, but Donne's words seem equally apropos today, particularly for climate change:

No man is an Iland, intire of itselfe; every man is a peece of the Continent, a part of the maine; if a Clod bee washed away by the Sea, Europe is the lesse, as well as if a Promontorie were, as well as if a Mannor of thy friends or of thine owne were; any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in Mankinde; And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.

It's hard not to connect this quote with climate change. Climate change exemplifies the kind of inter-dependencies that Donne (and later Blackmun) spoke of – this is indeed a bell that tolls for all of us. Indeed, the state argued specifically in [Massachusetts v. EPA](#) that the Massachusetts coast would be “washed away by the Sea” due to rising sea levels and that the state would be “the lesse” as a result.

As Jody Freeman and Andrew Guzman point out in a forthcoming article in the Columbia Law Review, the harms of climate change should concern us even if they take place halfway around the world. Although they develop the point in detail, the basic idea is simple. For instance, if millions of people are forced out of Bangladesh by flooding, that won't be good for stability on the Indian subcontinent — where, as you may recall, there are a lot of people who already don't like each other, some of whom have access to nuclear weapons.

You don't have to be a bleeding-heart to figure out that “what happens to them there” also “affects us here.” John Donne said it far more eloquently, but it's the simple truth.